

Wassaw

National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS



photo: Gray's Reef NMS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1969.
- Acres: 10,070 acres.
Located in Chatham County, Georgia.
- Location: the refuge is located 20 miles southeast of the city of Savannah. The refuge is only accessible by boat.

The refuge is bordered by the Wilmington River and Wassaw Sound on the north, the Vernon River and Ossabaw Sound on the South, and the Atlantic Ocean on the east. Salt marsh and tidal creeks separate the refuge from the mainland and Skidaway Island to the west.

Natural History

- The 10,070-acre migratory bird refuge consists of a single barrier island (Wassaw Island), tidal salt marsh, two smaller islands (collectively known as Little Wassaw Island), several small hammocks, and 20 acres of leased land on the mainland (Priest Landing).
- The refuge, with approximately 25 miles of boundary or shoreline, is comprised of 76 percent salt marsh, 24 percent beach dune and upland forest communities, roads, trails, and administrative land.
- Seven miles of undeveloped beach provides nesting habitat for the threatened Loggerhead sea turtle. Numerous species of shorebirds visit this spectacular beach. The bald eagle nests annually on one of the outlying hammocks and the endangered wood stork can be found feeding in the tidal marshes and waters of the refuge.

Financial Impact of the Refuge

- Wassaw Refuge is a part of a seven refuge complex that has a staff of 26 and an annual budget of \$1,169,800.
- The refuge attracts over 9,000 visitors each year.

Refuge Objectives

- Maintain and protect the coastal maritime forest, marsh, and beach communities.
- Provide habitat for migratory birds, wading and shorebirds, and native fauna.
- Provide habitat for endangered and threatened loggerhead sea turtles, wood storks, the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and piping plover.
- Provide recreation and environmental education for the public.

Management Tools

- Prescribed fire and wildfire suppression.
- Sea-turtle nest monitoring.
- Managed white-tail deer hunts.
- Exotic species control.
- Law enforcement.
- Education/interpretation.

Public Use Opportunities

- Trails.
- Bicycling.
- Saltwater fishing.
- Sea kayaking.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Daytime beach use.

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Calendar of Events

April: Shore and song bird spring migration.

May-August: Loggerhead sea-turtle nesting.

May-September: Caretta research project.

July-September: Loggerhead sea turtle hatchlings.

September: Coast Week, shore and song bird fall migration.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, archery/primitive weapons deer hunt.

November: rifle deer hunt.

Questions and Answers

How to I get out to the refuge? Is a boat available to take me out there?

Wassaw Island is a barrier island that is only accessible by boat. The refuge doesn't provide transportation, however, charters are available from local marinas. Individuals can access the island in personal boats.

When is the refuge open to the public?

The refuge is open year round, from sunrise to sunset, except during a five-day period in October and November when refuge deer hunts are conducted.

What can a family do on the refuge?

The refuge is managed for wildlife and to maintain the island in its natural state. The public is welcome to enjoy the beach and interior trails for hiking, bicycling, and wildlife observation. Although swimming and picnicking is permitted on the beach, open fires and pets are not allowed.

Is fishing allowed on the refuge?

There are only shallow, seasonal ponds in the interior of the island. Surf fishing is permitted on the beach.

Where is the best place to access the island?

Most people anchor their boats off the north or south ends of the island. The refuge has a boat dock at the small headquarters office on Wassaw Creek. The public is welcome to load or unload passengers at the dock to access trails or obtain visitor information. However, due to the small size of the dock, boats must be anchored away from the dock in the creek.